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ABSTRACT

Data from a longitudinal study of London women who resumed full-time employment within 9 months of having a first child were used in this paper's examination of the child care histories of the women's children up to the age of 3 years. Contacts were made when children were 4- to 5-months-old (usually before the mother had resumed employment), and when children were 11-, 18-, and 36-months-old. Mothers were seen at all contacts, and children were seen at all except the contact at 11 months. At 18 and 36 months, most nonparental caregivers were also visited. Data were collected by a variety of methods, including developmental assessments of children, observations of the child at home and in the nonparental child care setting, questionnaires about child temperament and social behavior, diaries covering children's activities for a week, and interviews with mothers and nonparental caregivers. Findings indicated a high level of discontinuity, both in mothers' employment status and in child care arrangements, during this period. Placements with relatives and childminders were more liable to change than were placements in nurseries. It is argued that discontinuity should be seen as being substantially the product of various features of social context in the United Kingdom. These features include governmental and employer policies, and dominant ideologies about parenthood and child care. (RH)

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Maternal Employment and Childcare in the First Three Years after Birth

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ABSTRACT

The paper uses data from a longitudinal study of London women who resumed full-time employment within 9 months of having a first child, to examine the childcare histories of their children upto the age of 3. There was a high level of discontinuity, both in mothers' employment status and in childcare arrangements, over this period. Placements with relatives and childminders were more liable to change than placements in nurseries. The paper argues that discontinuity should be seen as substantially the product of various features of the social context in the UK, including dominant ideologies about parenthood and childcare and Government and employer policy

Dual-earner households; maternal employment; childcare

Childcare histories, that is the arrangements made for the care of children over time, play an important part in understanding the development of children. They describe the types of care that children receive, the continuity in arrangements and reasons for discontinuity. Although several studies have concluded that children may suffer negative effects when care arrangements lack continuity (Clarke-Stewart, 1977; US Dept of HEW, 1978; Rutter, 1982), there may be circumstances when change can be neutral or even beneficial, as when a child is moved to a setting providing better quality care or to a setting which provides a more age-appropriate environment.

Childcare histories are also relevant to understanding parents' experience, and in particular that of women who resume employment while they have young children. Continuity, or otherwise, of childcare arrangements, may help women in this situation to cope or may create problems that require time and energy to solve and may create additional stress.

There is relatively little information on children's childcare histories. Floge (1985) concludes that "the information we have regarding changes in day-care arrangements is sketchy, yet the existing evidence suggests that such changes are prevalent". Floge's own research consisted of a panel study, in which a sample of New York mothers having their first children in the early 1970s gave information at three points of time between 1973 and 1976. Her findings "indicate that most mothers change care arrangements frequently....(and that the most common trend

was the) substitution of group day care and multiple care arrangements for care (solely) by relatives".

While Floge's study provides much valuable information, it has a number of limitations. The data refer only to changes between types of care, for example, a change from care by a 'household relative' to care by a 'nonhousehold relative'. Changes involving the same type of care, for instance from one 'nonhousehold relative' to another, are not included. There is also no distinction made between different types of 'group arrangement', a category which includes daycare centres, nursery schools and kindergartens; and no description of the contribution made by the different components in 'multiple care arrangements'.

The Floge study, and the others that she refers to, come from various areas of the United States. Childcare in the United States, as in any individual country, occurs within a specific social context. Social context coincides with what Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) has referred to, in his ecology of human development, as the exosystem and macrosystem, that is "the formal and informal social structures that do not contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings" and the "overarching patterns of ideology and organisation that characterise a particular culture or subculture" (Belsky et al, 1982; 99).

To interpret findings from studies dealing with any aspect of childcare, it is important to situate these findings in their social context, since this will have a major influence on childcare arrangements and on children's experience in individual

settings. We begin this paper therefore by discussing features of the social context in the United Kingdom and how they are likely to affect childcare, before describing a longitudinal study, undertaken in the London area, of women who have resumed full-time employment within nine months of having a first child and presenting results from that study which describe the childcare histories of their children up to the age of 3.

Because of the focus of the study from which our data are drawn, which is on the experience of women resuming full-time employment after having a first child, the paper concentrates on childcare arrangements while mothers are in full-time employment. Our data shows that in most cases it is mothers who make the arrangements and service them (for instance, by taking and collecting children and liaising with the caregiver) (Moss, 1986; Brannen and Moss, 1988). It is important, however, to recognise that these arrangements are needed, in nearly all cases, because both parents have paid work: the children's experience, and any consequences, should be view in terms of parental and not just maternal employment.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The social context influencing childcare is extensive and complex in detail. In this paper, we have concentrated on 3 components which seem of particular relevance and importance in the United Kingdom - ideology, Government and employer policy, and parental participation in the labour force.

Ideology

A central feature of the dominant ideology in UK society about parenthood and childcare is that women with young children should not work. In the Women and Employment survey of 1980, 60% of women and 70% of men supported the view that "a married woman with children under school age ought to stay at home" while 25% and 17% agreed that "she should only go out to work if she really needs the money" (Martin and Roberts, 1984). In the 1987 British Social Attitudes Survey, 76% of respondents preferred a 'traditional' working arrangement for a family with a child under 5, that is the father working full-time in paid work, while the mother concentrates on unpaid work at home; moreover most of the remainder (17%) supported a 'compromise' arrangement, where the father had full-time paid work and the mother a part-time job. Very few preferred the situation where the mother had a full-time job (Ashford, 1987).

Other important components of the dominant ideology are that men's main role as father is to be breadwinners, and that young children should be at home and cared for by their mothers, at least until the age of 3. There is however a widely held view that around the age of 3, children begin to benefit from some group care experience, but that the most appropriate group care experience for children from 3 to compulsory school age at 5 is on a part-time basis.

Policy

The belief that young children should be at home with their

mothers has been reflected in the policy of successive postwar Governments. The 1968 Ministry of Health Circular on 'Day care facilities for children under 5' (which has yet to be superceded) emphasises "the view of medical and other authority... that wherever possible the younger pre-school child should be at home with his mother". Policy also reflects a belief, that has been increasingly prominent in the 1980s, that childcare, especially for employed parents, is a private issue for which society and the Government has no responsibility (Cohen, 1988).

As a consequence, publicly-funded childcare provision for children under 3 in the UK is very limited in quantity - there are places for less than 1% of this age group in such provision- and narrow in purpose. The 1968 Circular makes it clear that children receiving such provision do so because of some failing or deficiency on their own or their parents' part - "(public authorities responsibility) should continue to be limited to arranging for the day care of children who, from a health point of view or because of deprived or inadequate backgrounds, have special needs that otherwise cannot be met". The Circular specifies particular priority groups "in which the child or family need help". Parental employment is not included, except for "children with only one parent who has no option but to go out to work and who cannot arrange for the child to be looked after satisfactorily". There has never been sufficient publicly-funded childcare to meet the demand even from this group, and over recent years there have been fewer places available as an increasing proportion of provision has gone to children thought to be 'at risk' of abuse or neglect (Van der Eyken, 1984).

Other policy options, apart from the provision of publicly-funded childcare services, can affect the childcare arrangements needed or made by employed parents. Such policies are largely absent in the UK. There is no financial support for parents' childcare costs, for instance through tax relief; no statutory entitlement to paternity or parental leave or leave to care for sick children; and although there are some interesting developments by individual employers, in general collective agreements and individual employer practice offer little in the way of sustained support to employed parents (Cohen, 1988). The one policy which has been implemented to help employed mothers is a right to job reinstatement up to 29 weeks after giving birth. The impact of this legislation is however limited. Eligibility requirements are so restrictive that about half of all women do not qualify for this entitlement (Daniel, 1980); while benefit payments are available for less than half of this 'maternity leave' period and for most of this time at a low flat-rate.

Parental Participation in the Labour Force

These features help to explain other salient and relevant features of the social context, in particular labour force participation by men and women with young children. Parenthood results in most women leaving the labour force, at least for a period. Only 17% of women who had a first baby between 1975-79 had resumed employment within 6 months of the birth and only 25% within 12 months; while just 3% of women resumed employment within 6 months of each birth, and could therefore be said to have been continuously in the labour force throughout childbearing and childrearing (Martin and Roberts, 1984). This pattern is also reflected in a low employment rate (30% in 1985)

for women with at least one child under 5 (OPCS, 1987: Table 6.11). Moreover, and equally significant, most employed others are in part-time jobs (that is, under 30 hours a week), with a majority working less than 20 hours a week (Moss, 1988).

Parenthood has little impact on men's labour force participation 98% of men with a child under 5 are either employed or looking for work. Moreover the vast majority are employed full-time, with 30% of those who are in work employed 50 hours a week or more. Indeed there is some evidence that men's hours of employment increase when they have children (Moss and Brannen, 1987a).

SOCIAL CONTEXT AND CHILDCARE

Type of childcare arrangements made by employed parents

Social context has a direct impact on a number of areas which in turn determine childcare histories. First, and foremost, it has a strong influence on the type of childcare arrangements that are made. Employed parents in the UK seeking childcare must rely either on informal networks or the private market. At present, relatives are the main source of childcare for children with parents in full-time employment. Grandmothers are the relatives most commonly used, caring for 30-40% of all children under 5 with parents in full-time employment (Daniel, 1980; Martin and Roberts, 1984). This reliance on relatives and particularly grandmothers reflects the absence of publicly-funded services, but is also the product of limited demand - few mothers have full-time jobs - and sufficient supply, partly because

employment rates among married women drop off sharply in the age group over 55.

In countries where employment rates for mothers are higher than the UK and have been rising rapidly, the proportion of children cared for by relatives (though not necessarily the numbers) can be seen to fall, as demand begins to outstrip supply and also, possibly, as supply diminishes as more older women are in the labour force. In the United States, for instance, the proportion of children under 3 with mothers in full-time employment who were cared for by relatives fell from 49% in 1965 to 41% in 1982; during this period maternal employment rates nearly doubled (Hofferth and Phillips, 1987). The same trends are even more apparent in Denmark, with the added factor that there has been a large-scale development of publicly-funded childcare over the last 20 years (Moss, 1988).

For those parents who have to reply on the private market, childminding (family day care) is the most common arrangement. Most parents cannot afford 'nannies' (women who care for a child in the child's own home). The costs involved in providing care for very young children mean that there are few private nurseries (ie, day care centres not provided by local authorities) which take very young children. Following careful enquiry, it was possible to find only 33 nurseries of this kind which would consider taking children under 12 months in the whole Greater London area, which has a population of over 6.75 million and the highest level of private nursery provision in the UK. Only 3 were entirely unsubsidised 'for profit' nurseries. The remainder were workplace-attached or provided by community groups, in both

cases with some subsidy from employers or local authorities.

The impact of social context on type of childcare used can be further illustrated by taking the example of Denmark, where the social context is very different to that in the UK. In 1985, 90% of women in Denmark with a child under 5 were in the labour market; three-quarters were actually employed, with most working over 30 hours a week. Acceptance of maternal employment is now widespread, and since 1964 there has been a massive increase in publicly-funded childcare services, with the specific objective of providing for children with employed parents. In 1985, 62% of children under 3 with employed mothers were in publicly-funded services, divided 42:58 between nurseries and salaried childminding (ie, family daycare, where the caregivers are paid from public funds); put another way, just under 20% of children under 3 are in publicly-funded nurseries. The remaining 38% of children with employed parents are cared for by nannies, private childminders, by a parent or by a relatives. Relatives however account for less than 10% of care arrangements, and the proportion has fallen substantially over the last 10-15 years (Moss, 1988).

Quality of Care

While a clear connection can be demonstrated between the social context and the type of childcare arrangements used, the connection with other aspects of childcare, in particular children's actual experience or quality of care is more indirect.

Several possible connections can however be hypothesised. First, the operation of an entirely private market in childcare,

with no subsidy of parents' childcare costs, should lead to some relationships between parental resources, financial and otherwise, and the quality of the product used, in this case childcare. There has been little research to systematically identify who receives better or worse care. In the one UK study of childminding which has attempted this, there was some evidence to link parental resources to children's care: on the researchers' overall rating of quality, children of mothers born abroad and children whose mothers were in lower occupational groups received a poorer service (Mayall and Petrie, 1983).

Second, because of women's disadvantaged position in the labour market and the feminisation of childcare work, childcare workers in the private sector in general have poor pay and conditions. The situation has been documented for childminders and nannies (Cohen, 1988), but is also true for many of the relatively few workers in private nurseries which take very young children. Because of inadequate subsidisation, many of these nurseries have to economise and accept standards that are lower than those in local authority day nurseries. For instance, in the nurseries in our study, staff levels were often below those recommended by the Government and pay rates and related conditions were often below those paid by local authorities. Given the demanding nature of childcare work, it might be expected that these inadequate conditions would lead to problems in attracting workers of high calibre, establishing and maintaining high standards of work and in retaining workers. There is in fact is some evidence of high turnover among childminders (Moss, 1987), while others have commented on high turnover among nannies and nursery workers (Cohen, 1988).

Third, in practice, private providers do not invest in improving and maintaining quality - indeed they mostly lack the resources to do so. Some public funds are used for registration of private services (required by law except for nannies, and nurseries operating on crown and local authority property, such as schools, colleges and hospitals) and to provide some support for childminders. The impact of these limited regulatory and support measures varies between local authorities, according to the priority and resources that Social Services Departments allocate to them; even where support services are available, they may not be generally used. In our study, 40% of the childminders interviewed when children were 18 months had received no visit from a local authority worker in the preceding 6 months; 24% had attended a training course, though not necessarily completed it; 15% currently used a toy library; and just one attended a group for childminders (Martin and Mooney, 1987).

Private day nurseries receive even less supervision and support. We visited 32 of the 33 nurseries in the London area taking children under 12 months of age, to gather information about organisation, resources and support. Nine out of 32 were not registered with the local authority; and only 12 out of 32 nurseries reported receiving regular visits from Social Services or from any other public health and welfare agency (including health visitors). This minimal contact adds to the isolation of most private nurseries, which are 'one off' institutions run by organisations with no other childcare services and therefore no support infrastructure. The quality of very young (18 month old) children's experiences in private day nurseries in Britain

seems to suffer as a consequence of such poor resourcing, and seems to be worse than that offered in other types of care (Melhuish, 1988).

Defining, monitoring and developing quality in a complex area such as childcare services might be expected to require substantial resources deployed within a carefully structured system. Whatever the benefits of existing local authority registration and support for private childcare services, the resources deployed are small in absolute terms and in relation to parental expenditure on these services. Overall, there is no carefully structured system concerned with quality control and improvement: one consequence is that there is no comprehensive, regularly updated information on the quality of existing provision, or indeed about who gives or receives better or worse quality services.

Given all these adverse circumstances, it would be surprising if private childcare services, whether provided by nurseries or individual caregivers, were of a consistently high quality.

The Experience of Employed Mothers

The social context affects the experience of employed mothers. British society is not supportive, either in terms of employment and childcare policies or ideology; fathers also in general provide limited support, with few equally sharing responsibility for housework or childcare (Brannen and Moss, 1988). This lack of support is likely to raise the pressure experienced by mothers with full-time jobs and to increase the

proportion of these mothers who would prefer in present circumstances to work part-time or not be employed at all. Lack of congruence between actual and preferred employment status is important not only for mothers, but possibly too for their children. In her review of research on maternal employment, Hoffman (1983) concludes that "a reasonable hypothesis is that congruence between one's employment status and satisfaction with one's employment status will be related to high quality mother-child interaction....Studies with infants, as well as with other children, have consistently demonstrated that the mother's satisfaction with her employment status relates positively to the quality of mother-child interaction and also to various indices of the child's adjustment and abilities".

The lack of support, together with the expectations arising from the dominant ideology, also influence the employment histories of mothers. As already noted, only a very small proportion of women in the UK continue in employment throughout their years of active parenthood. Among those who continue at work after having a first baby, some view this as a temporary phase, until a second child is born or certain financial targets achieved; for this group, a break from employment is always assumed, but taken rather later than is usual. Others give up employment because they feel unable to continue coping with the demands or because of their feelings of guilt and anxiety. We shall describe later how many of the mothers in our sample had left full-time employment before their first child was 3.

METHODOLOGY

The Sample

The rest of this paper draws on data from a longitudinal study which has followed a group of women - who resumed full-time employment before their first child reached 9 months of age - and their children over the first 3 years of the child's life. This group was composed of three sub-groups, based on the type of nonparental childcare used when the mother resumed employment. The three types of childcare were relatives and childminders, the two most common forms of care for infants with parents in full-time employment; and nurseries, to enable group care to be compared with care in private household settings. The sample criteria, discussed below, meant that day nurseries run by local authorities were unlikely to provide children for their study. The nursery group therefore consisted entirely of children attending workplace, community or private nurseries. For purposes of comparison, a second group of women, who had not resumed employment within 9 months of birth, were also followed up, but this group is not discussed further in this paper.

The original objective was to have 60 women and children in each nonparental childcare sub-group, with a further 60 in the group of women not resuming employment. Each group of 60 was to be equally divided between women who, before giving birth, had been in professional or managerial jobs (Registrar General's Classification I and II) (OPCS, 1980) - referred to as 'high status jobs' - and women who had been in clerical, sales and manual jobs (Registrar General's Classification IIINM, IIIM, IV and V) - not referred to as 'low status jobs'.

Three other selection criteria were applied to make the sample, which varied in childcare and occupational status, relatively homogeneous on other variables - (i) that the child was the mother's first; (ii) that both parents were living together at the start of the study; and (iii) that the mother had been born in the UK or Ireland. The methods used to locate the sample, and the problems experienced especially in finding the nursery group, have been described elsewhere (Moss and Brannen, 1987b). Altogether over 4000 women were screened for meeting the above criteria, of whom 295 women were approached to participate in the study and 255 were interviewed at the first contact, an initial response rate of 83%. Subsequent attrition was low, with 243 of the original 255 women and children seen at all four contacts. The data presented in this paper is based on the 184 women, out of the total 243, who resumed full-time employment within 9 months of birth.

Despite our original objective of equal numbers in each childcare sub-group, we ended with different sized groups; nor were the sub-groups divided equally by occupational status. The actual size of each group and the reasons for this situation are discussed below.

Data Collection

Four contacts were made in the course of the study - when children were 4-5 months old, usually before the mother had resumed employment; then when children were 11, 18 and 36 months. Mothers were seen at all contacts and children at all except the 11 month contact; at 18 and 36 months most nonparental caregivers

were also visited. Data was collected by a variety of methods, including developmental assessments of children; observations of the child at home and in the nonparental childcare setting; the completion by the mothers of questionnaires about child temperament and social behaviour and dairies covering children's activities over a week; and interviews with nonparental caregivers and mothers. In these interviews, at each contact, mothers were asked to give full accounts of their own and their partner's employment histories since the last contact; and of the childcare arrangements used while they and their partners were at work, over the same period. Most of the data presented in this paper is drawn from these histories.

Data collection began in September 1982 and ended in March 1987. The sample lived, at least initially, in Greater London or on its borders.

RESULTS

The Employment Histories of Mothers

Women who are eligible for job re-instatement after birth need not resume employment until their child is 29 weeks old. As a consequence, women in the UK resuming employment after childbirth probably return to their jobs rather later than women in the USA (where there is no employment protection legislation concerning pregnancy and childbirth) and in much of Europe, where statutory maternity leave mainly covers only the first 6-12 weeks after the birth. In our sample, the median return to work was when children were 5 months old, with 22% returning before their

child was 4 months and 20% when their child was 7 or 8 months.

On the basis of their employment histories up to their child's third birthday, mothers can be placed into 4 groups. The first two groups had had a period when they had been employed part-time or had left the labour force altogether; Group 1, however, were not employed, full-time or part-time, when their child was 3 years old, while Group 2 were in part-time employment or back in full-time employment at that stage. Mothers in the next two groups had never been employed part-time or left the labour force entirely; Group 3, however, had had a break from employment during a second period of maternity leave, while Group 4 had been in continuous full-time employment.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 1 shows the breakdown between these four groups; the proportion of women in the first two Groups who had had a period of part-time employment in addition to full-time employment; and the average period in full-time employment for women in each group, and therefore the period during which children would have needed substantial periods of nonparental childcare. Women in Groups 1 and 2 accounted for 39% of the sample, and the average time in full-time employment for women in both groups was 11-12 months. The main difference between the groups was the much greater likelihood of women in Group 2 having also had a period of part-time employment. Women in Group 4 had the longest period of full-time employment - 31 months on average, nearly 6 months

more than women in Group 3 - but accounted for rather less than half (45%) the mothers who had originally resumed employment within 9 months of birth. For just over half, therefore, there were changes in employment status - for instance from full-time employment to maternity leave, from full-time employment to part-time, or from unemployment or part-time employment back to full-time - with implications for childcare arrangements.

Main Types of Childcare at Different Stages

Table 2 shows the main type of childcare used while mothers were in full-time employment at four points - when they first resumed full-time employment, and then when children were 12, 18 and 36 months old (as already noted, generally the same childcare arrangements was used while fathers were employed, though in a few cases where fathers were not employed they provided care while their partners were out at work). The Table also shows the childcare used initially and at 36 months by those mothers who were in continuous full-time employment up to their child's third birthday.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The Table illustrates how far the initial childcare sub-groups differed in size from the original objective of obtaining three equally sized groups. The nursery group was half-strength, due to the low level of provision; most of this group (31/34) consisted of women in high status jobs. The relative group was

slightly less than planned, and had a predominance of women in low status jobs (35/53). The childminder group was greater than planned, and had a preponderance of women in high status jobs (57/86), though less marked than for the nursery group. Finally, for various reasons, a small group of women who initially used other types of childcare were in the sample.

Over the four points of time covered in the Table, there is a movement from care by relatives and childminders to care in nurseries and by 'others', and particularly by nannies. This is due to two factors. First, nearly two-thirds (61%) of women in high status jobs who initially use relatives as their main form of childcare do not remain in full-time employment until their child is 3; this is a far higher proportion than for women in low status jobs initially using relatives or for women,in high or low status jobs, who initially use childminders or nurseries (for these groups, the proportion not in continuous full-time employment is 30-40%). Even allowing for this differential 'drop out' rate, there is still some movement among women who remain in full-time employment from relatives and childminders to nurseries and nannies; the movement to nurseries, however, mostly occurs in the early months back at work and reflects a few children who were initially placed in a temporary childcare arrangement, while waiting for a nursery places to become available. These trends are not strong, although by the time children are 3, nursery provision is more common than care by relatives, a reverse of the situation when mothers initially resumed employment.

Children Experiencing Change in Main Childcare Arrangements

This picture from cross-sectional analysis conceals much

more movement between childcare arrangements. This is revealed by a study of the childcare histories gathered for each child over the full period of the study. Table 3 summarises some of these changes. It shows that nearly half of all children had two or more childcare arrangements while their mothers were in full-time employment, in other words had at least one change of placement; half of these, or 21% of all children, had 2 or more changes. Moreover, a quarter of all children experienced one or more change in type of childcare, for example from a relative to a childminder or from a childminder to a nursery.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

As a consequence of these changes, and the high proportion of mothers who do not remain in full-time employment throughout, only a minority of children both have mothers in continuous full-time employment and remain in the same type of childcare throughout. Of the 184 mothers who resume full-time employment before their child is 9 months, 72 go part-time or leave the labour force altogether for some period before their child is 3, and 30 leave employment for a second period of maternity leave. Of the 82 children left, with mothers in continuous full-time employment, only half are in the same placement throughout: 23% are in the same type of childcare as when their mother first resumed employment, but have changed caregivers at least once in this time, leaving the remaining 27% in a different type of placement altogether by the time they are 3.

Changes in individual childcare arrangements

So far, we have concentrated on children as the unit of analysis in considering changes in children. We now consider individual childcare arrangements, of which there were 331. Table 4 shows how these were divided between different types of childcare lasted; and whether they ended in a change to another childcare arrangement or continued unchanged, either until the last contact in the study or until the mother stopped full-time employment. As well as the three main types of childcare, the Table includes an 'other' category; the 45 arrangements in this category included 4 with a shared nanny, 16 with an unshared nanny, 11 with the child's father, and 10 with the child's mother while she worked (eg, as a childminder). Finally, the Table provides a break-down of the reasons given by mothers for changing arrangements.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The average time in a placement was just over 16 months. Placements in nurseries, however, lasted considerably longer on average than other types of placement, for two reasons. First, women who initially used nurseries had a longer time period, on average, in full-time employment - 24.4 months, compared to 19.8 months for women who initially used relatives and 18.5 months for women who initially used childminders. Second, nursery placements were least likely to end in a move to another arrangement. Under a quarter ended in a change, compared to over two-fifths for the other three categories used in the Table;

indeed, the 'change rate' for these categories is remarkably similar, either 42% or 43%. The difference in 'change rate' between nurseries and either of the other types of care was significant at the .05 level: the differences between the 3 non-nursery types of care were not significant.

The reasons for change show a different profile for each childcare group. The main reasons for child in the relative group were changes initiated by the caregiver, either because of a change in her circumstances (eg, ill health or a move of house) or because she felt unable to cope; and temporary placements. Temporary placements might be needed to cover a break in a permanent placement (for example, where the caregiver was having a baby) or to cover the wait until a permanent placement became available (for example, until a nursery place was offered); a 'temporary' change therefore includes a movement from a permanent to a temporary placement and vice versa. Women in high status jobs were less likely than women in low status jobs to use relatives for childcare, but when they did it was much more often on a temporary basis; this type of placement accounted for a third of higher status placements with relatives, compared to under 10% for lower status placements.

Temporary placements were much less common in the nursery and childminder groups. Over half of all changes from childminding placements were initiated by the caregiver, or were because the parents were unhappy with the arrangement or because of some other problem concerning the child and the minder. The remainder divided between a change in the family circumstance (for example, moving house), temporary placements, and the

'other' category, which mainly consisted of parents moving children because they felt the caregiver was no longer able to meet their own or the child's needs (for example, they might feel a child was old enough to benefit from group care) and parents moving their child to a new placement following a break for maternity leave (overall, 20 mothers returned to employment after a second period of maternity leave; 13 resumed the previous childcare arrangement, and 7 changed to a new arrangement).

The relatively small number of 'nursery' changes divide equally between changes in family circumstances, parents unhappy with the arrangement and 'other reasons. While in the 'other' childcare group, changes initiated by caregivers are by far the main reason for change, dividing between fathers stopping care because they resume employment and nannies leaving (indeed, out of 16 placements with nannies, 7 ended as a result of the nanny leaving).

Overall, changes initiated by the caregiver were the most common reason for change, accounting for 36% of all placements that ended in a change and 15% of all placements. Changes due to altered family circumstances, temporary placements and for'other' reasons each accounted for approximately 15-20% of all placements ending in a change, and parents unhappiness with the arrangement for the remaining 10%.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

The timing of changes in employment status and childcare arrangements.

Table 5 shows the number of changes occurring in childcare arrangements and the number of mothers who left employment or moved to part-time employment during the first 12 months after the child's birth, then for each 6 month period upto the child's third birthday. Changes were most frequent in the first 12 months; as mothers on average resumed employment 5 months after birth, this period covers the first 6-7 months in employment for most mothers. In the subsequent 6 month blocks, the number of changes in childcare and the number of women stopping employment is fairly constant, though as time passes the reasons women stop employment are increasingly related to having a second child. Changes to part-time employment drop off after the child is 18 months.

Multiple care arrangements

So far the discussion has been concerned with the main childcare arrangement used while mothers were in full-time employment. In her New York study, Floge reported a marked trend to multiple childcare arrangements as children got older, largely due to an increase in the use of group care in combination with other arrangements. In our study, over half (55%) of children had at least one period while their mothers were in full-time employment when childcare arrangements involved two or even sometimes three components. The proportion of children in multiple arrangements increases over time - 25% of children at 12

months, 30% at 18 months, rising to 54% at 36 months.

Floge suggests that multiple childcare arrangements in her sample provide increased protection against childcare difficulties - "if one child-care provider becomes ill or otherwise unavailable, the mother has another provider on whom she can call, if only temporarily". Multiple arrangements in our sample were for quite different reasons. The reason for the increase between 18 and 36 months was children entering part-time group care during this period, but mostly after 30 months. By the age of 3, 34% of children with mothers in full-time employment attended some form of part-time group care, as part of their total childcare arrangement: if we exclude children in full-time nursery care, and therefore unlikely to be sent also to part-time group care, this figure increases to 42%. Most went to playgroup, a form of provision usually run by parent or local community groups or private proprietors, and attended on average 2 or 3 sessions a week, for 2-3 hours a session: part-time groupcare for our sample provided on average less than 8 hours care per week out of a total of over 30 hours a week of nonparental care.

Around the age of 3 many children in the UK enter playgroups or other part-time group care, including nursery education, whether or not their mothers are employed. As already mentioned, the dominant ideology concedes that such experience at this age may be beneficial. At 36 months, 53% of children in our sample whose mothers were not employed were in part-time group care, mostly in playgroups, a figure not much higher than for non-

nursery children whose mothers had full-time jobs.

If part-time group care is excluded, the proportion of children in multiple arrangements remains fairly constant over time (at 36 months, it is 26%), and 38% have at least one period when childcare arrangements include two or more components. The child's father was a second caregiver in 70% of these cases, and a relative in 24%. Multiple arrangements, therefore, mostly involved the father looking after his child for a period of time while the mother was at work, just as in fact many mothers cared for their child alone for a period while the father was out at work.

The amount of time children were cared for by second caregivers varied considerably. In 11% of cases, the second caregiver provided half or nearly half of the total weekly care, while in 22%, the second caregiver was involved for 10-19 hours a week; in most cases (66%) second caregivers looked after children for less than 10 hours a week, including a number of cases where this care was provided less than weekly (for instance where a mother had to work every third Saturday).

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In considering the results from our study, it should be emphasised that in socio-economic terms our sample was relatively favoured. It did not include several groups most likely to be financially disadvantaged or to experience the greatest

difficulties in making and keeping childcare arrangements, for instance lone mothers, ethnic minority households and households with two or more children. Households where one or both parents were in semi-skilled or unskilled manual jobs were few in number and were under-represented compared to the UK and London population.

Even within this relatively favoured sample, there was a high level of change in childcare arrangements, related to changes in the employment status of mothers and the movement of children between different arrangements. Once back at work after the birth, most mothers did not remain in full-time employment until their child was 3; time in full-time employment varied from 1 to 34 months. Childminding and relatives, the most common types of childcare used by parents in full-time employment in the UK, proved the types of care most liable to change. Changes initiated by caregivers because of altered circumstances or because they were unable to cope were significant in both cases; but while relatives were often involved in temporary placements, parental dissatisfaction with the placement was more common with childminders.

Nursery placements were least likely to be changed, and in this sense could be said to provide most continuity. They are however liable to other types of discontinuity in caregiving. High staff turnover may lead to children experiencing changes in who cares for them. Organisational features may also be important. Some nurseries in the study divided children into separate smaller groups, each with their own workers: others did not, so that children might be cared for by any of the workers in

the nursery. Where children were grouped, this was usually on the basis of age, in which case children would usually move between groups at least once before they were 3 (not often between 18 and 24 months), each move bringing a new set of caregivers.

Discontinuity therefore is of various kinds. It may be reflected in multiple childcare arrangements, changes of childcare placement, or changes in actual caregiver. Discontinuity may have negative or positive consequences for parents and children. Frequent changes in caregivers for the very young child will probably inhibit the caregiver's capacity to understand the idiosyncracies of early child communication: however, for the older child some change in caregivers may well augment the development of social skills. Each change in childcare placement places demands upon the parent, usually the mother, in negotiating the change: however, a beneficial change may alleviate previous anxieties. This paper has been primarily concerned with changes in childcare placements, and this source of discontinuity needs to be considered as but one aspect, albeit a major one, of the pattern of continuity and discontinuity in childcare.

Discontinuity in mothers' employment status and childcare arrangements should, we have argued, be seen as the product of various features of the social context. Features of particular importance in the UK context are dominant ideologies about parenthood and childcare, policy or the lack of it by Government and employers and parental participation in the labour force. Thus, for example, current policies lead to the great majority of

children being cared for in types of provision that are inherently more liable to discontinuity, and to caregivers working for poor pay and conditions which encourages high turnover.

These features of the current context are also likely to influence other aspects of children's and mothers' experience. It is clear that the social context in the UK is supportive neither of mothers in full-time employment nor of their children (or indeed the women who care for those children). The situation is not conducive to the development of childcare provision of a consistently high quality; or for helping parents reconcile occupational and family responsibilities.

In undertaking single country studies of maternal employment or of dual earner households or of children receiving non-parental childcare, there are no statistical techniques that can control for this factor of social context. It needs however to be kept constantly in mind in interpreting results and drawing appropriate conclusions from them. It also suggests the importance of conducting transnational studies, and of comparing results from studies in different countries, choosing countries with substantive differences in significant aspects of their social contexts. Unfortunately, most reviews of the research literature in this area limit themselves to English-language papers and deal almost exclusively with studies conducted in North America, mostly in the United States.

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TABLE 1: Full-time employment histories of mothers who resumed full-time employment before first child was 9 months old, upto child's third birthday.

Employment Group		Group as % of Total	Average time mothers in Group in full-time employment	% of Group employed part-time at some stage
1. Not employed when child = 36 months (N = 33)	HS	16	11.8 (months)	
	LS	21	11.5	
	Total	18	11.7	21
2. Employed when child = 36 months, but had period when not employed or employed part-time (N = 39)	HS	24	11.1	
	LS	16	12.3	
	Total	21	11.5	85
3. Employed full-time throughout except for second maternity leave (N = 30)	HS	19	25.1	--
	LS	12	25.4	
	Total	16	25.2	
4. Employed full-time throughout (N = 82)	HS	41	31.0	--
	LS	51	30.6	
	Total	45	30.8	

Key: HS = In high status job before birth; LS = In low status job before birth;

TABLE 2: Main type of childcare arrangement for children with mothers in full-time employment.

Main type of Childcare	When mother resumes full-time employment (N =184)		When child = 12 months (N = 171)	18 months (N = 133)	36 months (N = 107)	
	%		%	%	%	
Relative	29	(25)	22	19	16	(17)
Childminder*	50	(55)	51	53	47	(46)
Nursery	16	(15)	21	21	23	(23)
Other	5	(5)	7	7	15	(13)
- Nanny	2	(2)	1	3	6	(8)
- Father	3	(2)	3	2	2	(2)
- with mother	-		1	-	5	(1)

* - Includes 1 - 3% of children with a 'shared nanny'

The figures in brackets are for children whose mothers were in continuous employment (except for a second maternity leave) and were employed when the child was 36 months old (N = 99).

TABLE 3: Childcare arrangements (CCAs) for children with mothers in four Employment Groups.

Employment Group		No. of CCAs	Average No. of CCAs per child	% of children who had 2 or more CCAs	% of children who had change in type of care
1. Not employed when child = 36 months (N = 33)	HS	27	1.5	39	17
	LS	21	1.4	20	20
	Total	48	1.45	30	18
2. Employed when child = 36 months, but had period when not employed or employed full-time (N = 39)	HS	53	2	52	37
	LS	18	1.5	42	8
	Total	71	1.8	30	28
3. Employed full-time throughout ecept for second maternity leave (N = 30)	HS	37	1.8	43	29
	LS	14	1.6	56	22
	Total	51	1.7	47	27
4. Employed full-time throughout (N = 82)	HS	82	1.8	44	22
	LS	76	2.05	54	35
	Total	158	1.9	49	28
5. Total (1+2+3+4)	HS	199	1.8	45	26
	LS	129	1.8	45	26
	Total	328	1.8	45	26

Key: HS - In high status job before birth; LS - In low status job before birth;

TABLE 4: Childcare placements by type of childcare, number that ended because child was moved, and reason for move.

		Type of childcare				
		Relative	Childminder	Nursery	Other	Total
No. of placements in	HS	31	97	39	30	197
type of childcare	LS	45	65	9	15	134
	Total	76	162	48	45	331
Average time in	HS	8	17	20	9	16
placement (months)	LS	18	14	12	20	16
	Total	14	16	19	12	16
% of placements that	HS	52	44	26	37	40
ended because child	LS	36	42	22	53	40
was moved	Total	42	43	23	42	40
% of moves because:						
a) change in	HS	6	12	(3/9)	(1/11)	11
circumstances in	LS	-	26	(1/2)	(2/8)	19
child's family	Total	3	17	36	16	14
b) start or end	HS	62	14	-	(2/11)	22
of temporary	LS	25	7	-	(1/8)	13
placement	Total	44	11	-	16	19
c) parents unhappy	HS	-	21	(2/9)	-	14
with placement/	LS	6	15	(1/2)	(1/8)	13
child not settled	Total	3	19	27	5	14
d) change initiated by						
caregiver because of	HS	31	35	-	(5/11)	31
change in circumstances	LS	56	44	-	(2/8)	43
or unable to cope	Total	44	39	-	37	36
e) other	HS	-	19	(4/9)	(3/11)	19
reason	LS	12	7	-	(2/11)	11
	Total	6	14	36	26	16

Key: HS - Placements involving children whose mothers had a higher status job before birth; LS - Placements involving children whose mothers had a low status job before birth;

TABLE 5: Timing of changes in mother's employment status and of movements between childcare arrangements.

	Child's age in months				
	0-12	12-17	18-23	24-30	31-36
No. of movements between childcare arrangements	52	18	16	25	15
No. of changes from full-time to part-time employment	9	10	3	6	4
No. of changes from full-time employment to not employed	23	7	7	8	6